(c) the role being played by Government to help installation of a democratic Government in Iraq?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) to (c) Government has been following developments in Iraq. It would not be appropriate for Government to comment on the internal developments within Iraq.

Release of Indian fishermen by Pakistan

3148. SHRIMATI N.P. DURGA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is true that Pakistan has freed 529 fishermen in March, 2005;

(b) if so, the number of fishermen or other Indians still illegally detained by Pakistan in various jails of Pakistan; and

(c) the measures Government are taking for release of remaining Indians from Pakistani Jails?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) Pakistan Government released 528 Indian fishermen on March 22, 2005.

(b) About 270 Indian fishermen are still held in Pakistani jails.

(c) Government is constantly taking up with the Government of Pakistan, through diplomatic channels, the matter of the release of the remaining Indian fishermen. During the Foreign Secretary level talks held on 27-28 December, 2004 at Islamabad, it was agreed that repatriation of fishermen of each other's country would be done immediately after the completion of sentence and nationality verification. During the visit of External Affairs Minister to Pakistan from February 15-17, 2005, the issue of early release and repatriation of all the Indian fishermen along with their boats was again taken up.

Normalisation of relations with Pakistan

3149. SHRI MATILAL SARKAR: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether there is significant development in respect of border crimes, infiltration, attacks by terrorists and the number of people

undertaking official journey between India and Pakistan in the proportion of normalisation of relations;

(b) the remarkable signs of improvements in socio-cultural fields; and

(c) whether the so-called Kashmir problem has become a barrier in this process of normalisation?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) and (b) Significant developments have taken place in India-Pakistan relations since April 2003. Relations have been restored at the level of High Commissioners; transport and communication links have resumed; one round of Composite Dialogue has been completed; a series of technical level and Composite Dialogue related meetings have been held on schedule. Another round has been initiated with the Foreign Secretary level talks in December 2004.

People to people exchanges are taking place across the spectrum in large numbers. There has been a resumption of visits by pilgrim groups. Our High Commission is issuing close to 10,000 visas per month.

The bilateral process has been given impetus through maintenance of high level contacts. The meeting between Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh and President Musharraf in New York in September 2004 was followed by the visit of Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz to New Delhi on November 23-24, 2004. February 2005 saw a bilateral visit by an Indian EAM to Pakistan after a gap of almost 16 years. President Musharraf visited India from April 16-18, 2005 to witness the India-Pakistan cricket match.

During the External Affairs Minister, Shri K. Natwar Singh's visit from 15-17 February, 2005, agreements were reached to start bus services between Srinagar and Muzaffarabad, and between Lahore and Amritsar, including to religious places such as Nanakana Sahib. Pakistan also agreed to work towards early restoration of the Khokrapar-Munabao rail link. The Srinagar Muzaffrabad bus has already been operationalized from April 7, 2005.

The ceasefire, being observed along the International Border, the LoC, and the AGPL in Siachen, with the exception of two incidents, has held for more than a year.

India has agreed to discuss the proposal of a pipeline through Pakistan, subject to satisfaction of our concerns on security and adequate supplies.

Agreeements would be concluded in the coming months on Pre-notification of Missile Tests, and between Coast Guards and Pakistan's Maritime Security Agency, as well as between the narcotics control authorities of the two countries. Discussions would begin on Agreements on Preventing Incidents at Sea, and Reducing the Risk of Nuclear Accident or Unauthorised use of Nuclear Weapons.

Progress has been made in meetings on conventional and nuclear CBMs, and a Joint Survey of the boundary pillars in the International Boundary in the Sir Creek has also been successfully concluded in January 2005.

Significant progress has been achieved on the humanitarian issue of fishermen and civilian detenues. During the Foreign Secretary level talks in December 2004, it was *inter-alia* agreed that:

* Immediate notification would be provided to the respective High Commissions through the Foreign Ministries of arrested Pakistani/ Indian nationals;

* Consular access would be provided within three months of apprehension;

* Repatration would be done immediately after completion of sentence and nationality verification;

* A mechanism would be introduced for early repatriation, without sentencing of inadvertent crossers;

* A similar mechanism would be established for early release, wihout sentencing of those under 16 apprehended by either side.

Since then, Pakistan has released 266 Indian fishermen in January 2005; it has relesed additional 528 Indian fishermen and 36 civilian prisoners were released in March 2005. India has provided consular access to 113 civilian prisoners in 2005 and 22 civilian prisoners are slated to be released in April 2005. We are currently releasing 156 out of 194 Pakistani fishermen in our custody.

Thus meaningful progress has been achieved in the process of normalisation of India-Pakistan relations.

(c) Government are committed to continuing the present pocess of building confidence, enhancing cooperation and dialogue in an atmosphere

free from terrorism and violence, and to discuss any outstanding bilateral issue with Pakistan, including Jammu and Kashmir.

Relaxation in Visa norms for Artists

3150. SHRIMATI KUM KUM RAI: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether visa facilities for artists, film personalities and literary people between India/Pak and SAARC countries have been relaxed;

(b) If so, the particulars of two way visa/visits arranged during the last 3 years along-with the names of the artists etc.;

(c) the role of the ICCR and the outgo of funds from it on visits/travel grants and incoming troupe; and

(d) the names of the Governing body members of ICCR for the last six years?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) No Sir.

(b) Details of visits sponsored by ICCR to SAARC countries and from SAARC countries hosted by ICCR during the last three years are given in the Statement-I (*See* below).

(c) The primary objective of the Council is to establish, revive and strengthen cultural relations and mutual understanding between India and other countries. The expenditure incurred on visits of artists during the last three years was Rs. 434.49 lakhs in 2001-02, Rs. 721.17 lakhs in 2002-03 and Rs. 927.01 lakhs in 2003-04.

(d) The names of Governing Body members of ICCR for the last six years may please be seen in the enclosed Statement-II.

Statement-I

Details of two way visits arranged by ICCR from SAARC countries Incoming Performing Delegation

Year	Country	Name of the Delegation
1	2	3
2001-02	Nepal	9-Member Dance Group from 14-23 January, 2002
2002-03	Nepal	10-Member Folk Dance & Music of Sanskritik Sansthan from 10-18 September, 2002